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"This green plot shall be our stage": Shakespeare at Winedale and the pedagogy of play and place

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“This green plot shall be our stage”: Shakespeare at Winedale

and the pedagogy of play and place

by

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“This green plot shall be our stage”: Shakespeare at Winedale and the pedagogy of play and place

by

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Shakespeare at Winedale is one of the most unique and extensive Shakespeare-through-performance programs in the nation, yet it has not received much critical attention. This report suggests that Shakespeare at Winedale's innovations deserve closer attention, as they can provide insights on what can be possible with a "total immersion" performance approach with Shakespeare. The report examines: 1) the cultural and historical elements that came together to create the program, including the story of how program founder James Ayres first brought students out to Winedale; 2) the unique pedagogical advantages of the Winedale setting and the learning opportunities it invites; 3) an attempt to place Shakespeare at Winedale somewhat in context of both the cultural

currents of the time and the growing acceptance in the academy of the performance approach; 4) the Winedale program's emphasis on play as an approach to the text; 5) Ayres's concept of the "second play," which is made is possible through the isolation of the setting and the intense sense of community fostered at Winedale. The report is aimed primarily at teachers at any level interested in new insights into the value and possibilities of the performance approach to Shakespeare, but also at any students and teachers of the texts.

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A summer saying "yes", and feeling free
Among the meadows where we learned to play,
We sang our songs beneath the greenwood tree…

"Winedale Villanelle," by Paul Edmondson

Luck is when preparation meets opportunity.

-- Darrell Royal,
legendary football coach,
University of Texas Longhorns

In August of 2015, former University of Texas students from around the country will brave the Texas heat and return to the rolling farmland between Austin and Houston to celebrate the 45th anniversary of a one-of-a-kind Shakespeare-through-performance program: Shakespeare at Winedale, which each summer invites 16-18 undergraduates to spend ten weeks exploring three of Shakespeare's plays through performance in an isolated rural setting. At Winedale, an open-sided hay barn, built in the late 19th century by a German immigrant, serves as classroom and theater, with the hay lofts providing an audience balcony on one end and a dual-level playing space on the other, aided by a small, foot-high thrust stage. During the final month of a Winedale summer, the undergraduate English course becomes a bucolic Shakespearean festival

as the Theater Barn's bricked floor is lined with metal folding chairs for public performances and visitors picnic on the Winedale grounds in the shade of large pecan trees. An additional spring semester Winedale course brings 15-20 students out for two weekends at Winedale and culminates in two performances. The summer program's geographic isolation and intense demands invite an intense and often deeply challenging group learning experience; students work, often on their feet, from dawn until past 10 p.m. each day of the summer, with little free time. A singular focus on the language, characters, and worlds of the three plays (and sometimes a fourth by a contemporary of Shakespeare's such as Marlowe) is made possible by the Forest-of-Arden-like freedom from the distraction and interruptions of city life. It is not a training program for aspiring actors; students often have very little previous performing experience, and are not directed in their performances as theater majors might be, but rather must arrive at their own individual and class interpretations of characters and plays through discussion, experimentation, and shared exploration.

Students often leave the program passionate about seeing, hearing, and helping create ensemble-based performances of Shakespeare; and though Winedale is not a drama academy, it has helped inspire the creation of at least 21 theater groups in Austin, including the long-running Esther's Follies comedy troupe and the award-winning Rude Mechs ensemble, both known for their playful and passionate group-created productions. The roster of those who become known as "Winedalers" after their participation in the program includes a Tony Award-winning Broadway director, an Oscar-winning producer at a major independent film studio, a current U.S. Ambassador, an executive vice-president of a major university medical center, and countless

doctors, scientists, professors, teachers, academics, lawyers, writers, and entrepreneurs (though, interestingly, very few working actors). Many of these former students of the program speak openly of how Shakespeare at Winedale was a life-changing experience for them and a highlight of their years at the university, and maintain close friendships with many of their former classmates. The program has also developed an Outreach-to-schools component, which brings the ensemble performance approach to Shakespeare to students in grades 3-5 in low-income communities. Shakespeare at Winedale founder James Ayres – retired from teaching at the university – now leads two sessions each summer of a two-week residential program for children ages 11-16 called Camp Shakespeare, which culminates in several public performances of an entire Shakespeare play.

Of late, Shakespeare at Winedale has received national and international recognition: In the summer of 2014, it was one of 14 Shakespeare festivals in the United States and the only university-based one chosen for a commemorative visit by the "Shakespeare on the Road" research tour organized by scholars from the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust and the University of Warwick. Later that summer Shakespeare at Winedale founder Dr. James B. Ayres and current director Dr. James Loehlin – who was a student of Ayres's at Winedale in the early 1980's – were honored by the American Shakespeare Center in Staunton, Va., with the Burbage Award, given each year to those whose "work behind the scenes has advanced the enjoyment of the works of William Shakespeare for the delight and instruction of the world." But Shakespeare at Winedale is something of a outlier in the world of Shakespeare-through-performance studies; search today for "Shakespeare at Winedale" on JSTOR and the first thing that comes up is a 40-

year-old article by the legendary Texas political columnist Molly Ivins that was first published in the magazine *Change* in 1973. There are many examples available to us in recent academic literature of inspiring Shakespeare courses on university campuses that engage students in the text through the activity of performance (as opposed to simply the viewing of performances on video or in the theater), and the names of leading Shakespeare-through-performance scholars and practitioners such as Homer Swander, Miriam Gilbert, Hugh Richmond, Alan Dessen, John Russell Brown, and Edward Rocklin are well-known from scholarly books and the pages of *Shakespeare Quarterly* – but the pedagogical innovations of Shakespeare at Winedale have not received much critical attention over the past 45 years outside the broad circle of former Winedale students, the University of Texas community, local news media, and longtime Winedale playgoers from around the state. [1]

My mission here, then, is to remedy that situation somewhat by highlighting what I believe to be some of the unique teaching and learning approaches of the program and sharing them with a broader audience. Shakespeare at Winedale's organic pedagogy of play and place – *play* as in the active, energetic, invitational spirit of human play, and *place*, referring to the historically and culturally rich setting of the Winedale properties – makes it a singular experiment in the history of Shakespeare-through-performance studies. This discovery and gradual development of a "play-scape" for exploring Shakespeare's texts over a sustained period of time in a removed rural setting is, as far as I can tell through a survey of the scholarly literature, a first at the university level. Experimental theater troupes have found ways to isolate themselves for

[1] James Loehlin gave the first brief scholarly description of the program in his chapter "Teaching Through Performance" in *A Companion to Shakespeare and Performance* (2005), edited by Barbara Hodgdon and W.B. Worthen.

intense, focused work in an remote setting, but I know of no other liberal arts course where undergraduate students are invited to journey to the Forest of Arden, as it were, for two months of work and play, and then have the opportunity to share the discoveries from that experience on a stage as part of an ensemble of non-actors presenting three plays in repertory.

In one sense, Shakespeare at Winedale's unique features and history make it well-nigh impossible to replicate as an educational model. How many universities just happen to own an old hay barn in the countryside with a dorm down the road? For that matter, how many professors are willing to spend two months living out in the countryside each summer with 18 undergraduates and one assistant? But Shakespeare at Winedale began with a weekend visit, not a two-month stay – and many of the educational benefits of exploring Shakespeare actively in a removed setting were apparent immediately to students and teacher alike after that first weekend trip in the fall of 1970. The ongoing experiment that is Shakespeare at Winedale offers a fascinating look at just how far one can take the performance approach, and how profound an impact such an experience can have on students and educators willing to commit to it – and I believe those discoveries can provide inspiration and fresh ideas for any educator interested in the rich possibilities that come with the performance approach. Much virtue in "if."

My focus in this essay is on four key areas I believe to be of potential interest to teachers and students of Shakespeare: 1) The unusual set of elements that first came together to make the Shakespeare at Winedale program possible; 2) The uniqueness of the Winedale setting, and how it engaged the students in ways that connected with the themes and stories of many of the plays being studied; 3) the "play approach" emphasized by Ayres, and why it worked so powerfully at

Winedale; and Ayres's concept of "the second play" at Winedale and how it helps facilitate a state of epiphanic learning where a "sounding of the play" and a "sounding of the self" become powerfully intertwined. In addition, I will seek to provide some degree of context for how the program fits into the history of the performance approach at the university level.

In order to help the reader understand how Shakespeare met Winedale, I must begin at the beginning. So now I shall, like old Gower in *Pericles*, launch you into the journey that begins our tale. *To sing a song that old was sung…*

* * *

On a brisk Friday afternoon in November of 1970, University of Texas assistant professor James Ayres and a dozen or so undergraduates in his fall Shakespeare class tossed their copies of *Much Ado About Nothing* into overnight bags, hopped in their cars, and slipped away from Austin into the gently rolling farmland east of town. Their destination was a place none of the students had ever heard of before, a locale too small to be found on their gas-station travel maps; Ayres himself had just discovered it a month earlier. They drove past grazing cattle and small-town storefronts, down an undulating two-lane county highway lined by large oaks draped with Spanish moss, and finally, an hour after leaving town, around the town square in tiny Round Top with its modest courthouse, until they rolled up to their destination: Winedale, a sparsely populated German-Texan farming community that consisted of a country store and café, a restored stagecoach inn, a sprinkling of other historic structures, and an open-sided 19th-century

hay barn set in the middle of a grassy meadow before a stately row of loblolly pines. Everything except the Wagner's Store and Café had been, for five years, the property of the University of Texas at Austin. Over the next two days and nights, the old Winedale barn would be the wide-open "empty space" [2] where Ayres and his students would spend the weekend exploring the language and characters of *Much Ado;* in the evenings they would sleep a hundred yards away in Lauderdale House, an 1850s Classic Revival home moved to the property and remodeled into a dormitory. Freed from the constraints of a classroom and isolated from the distractions of city and university life, the students were able to dive into their performance work with a fresh energy and play scenes together late into the chilly nights, somewhat warmed by a pot-bellied stove.

The Winedale trip had not been on the syllabus at the beginning of the semester. It was a surprise to everyone in the class. [3] Ayres had come into classroom a few weeks earlier excitedly telling students about an upcoming weekend field trip to a place with an improbably pastoral name, to which he'd been invited the week before, for a university reception and dinner party, which he fortuitously decided to attend. He drove out alone to that event, and would later reflect on the final leg of that initial journey from Austin to Winedale and, through the lens of memory, reshape it as a the prologue of sorts to what would come next – an encounter that would set his teaching of Shakespeare-through-performance on a dynamic new course over the next three decades:

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[2] Peter Brook's influential book had been published just two years earlier, and would soon be a core text on the Winedale course reading list.

[3] Interview with Idalia Clark, a member of the first Winedale classes, June 2014.

> I found my way there not down the paved highway but through the right-angle maze of gravel lanes worn by tractors and pickups from Highway 237 near Carmine to Muske Road, just a quarter mile north of Winedale. Why I followed that route rather than the more direct one, I've forgotten. What I do remember, however, are the six or seven choices of turning right or left. I've often reflected upon the details of that journey, mythologizing the sense of discovery, as images prefiguring what was to come – the risks of taking the "other," bumpy, way; losing to find; confronting choices; awakening faith, following intuition; and release, relief, reward – as I made the final turn and saw the place in the distance for the first time.[4]

When Ayres walked up to the gathering, he saw the famous Texan who had donated this 190-acre property to the University of Texas five years earlier, and still graced it with her presence whenever she could: Houston philanthropist Ima Hogg, "The First Lady of Texas," an opera-attending, history-loving grande dame, daughter of former governor James Hogg, heir to an oil and gas fortune, patroness of the arts and a beloved public figure. [5] "Miss Ima," as she was often called (partly because this was still a part of the Deep South, and because she never married, but also perhaps because the unfortunate combination of her first and last name had prompted giggles from generations of Texas schoolchildren), had lovingly restored the site's historic buildings and formally dedicated the property to her alma mater in 1967 as an outdoor history museum and center for learning. A newsreel from the summer of that year shows Hogg showing Lady Bird Johnson and other dignitaries around the grounds and showing off the painted wall decorations inside of the Stagecoach Inn. [6]

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[4] From a short essay by James Ayres, 1990.

[5] The reception was connected to another Hogg project that has decades later become a respected part of her legacy: the Hogg Foundation for Mental Health, established as part of the university by Hogg and her brother in 1940, which was saluting its outgoing president.

[6] Viewable on youtube at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=39V0sM9iq9A; Winedale footage begins at the 7:20 mark.

Ayres spotted Miss Ima – wearing her trademark pearl necklace and sweetly frumpy hat, graciously greeting visitors in a receiving line – as he walked up, and decided to wait his turn in line. After a courtly handshake, Hogg asked Ayres what he taught, and he answered "Shakespeare," which prompted her to reminisce about all the great Shakespeare productions her father had taken her to see around the world in her youth -- and then she said, gesturing to the old structure behind Ayres, "I want you to go look in that barn over there." Moments later he found himself in a space that immediately evoked the rough magic of Shakespeare's "wooden O" – airy space in natural light (from the open sides), a reddish clay floor, rough-hewn cedar beams that once were part of a nearby cotton gin, and two haylofts to provide a second level on one side and an audience balcony on the other. (He also noticed the baby grand piano sitting right in the middle of it all – moved there by Hogg for barn concerts featuring Texas piano prodigy James Dick, who would soon found his own "Globe," the Festival Hill concert and music education center in Round Top, five miles back up the road, which has its own Fayette County founding tale and has now grown to become an entire complex attracting artists, visitors, and students from around the world). When Ayres strolled back up to Miss Ima and told her the space reminded him of features of the Globe, she nodded and issued a regal command: "I want you to do Shakespeare in that barn." As Ayres mused years later: "When Miss Ima told you to do something, you did it." [7]

And so now, four weeks having quickly steeped themselves in night, here the young professor was, striding towards old barn again in the late afternoon light, but this time

[7] Interview with Ayres by author, 1990.

accompanied by his excited students, all of them soaking up the quiet of the countryside, sensing the possibilities of a new learning environment. By the weekend's end, both the teacher and students knew that they had found a special place to learn, play, take risks, and grow together. "The whole thing just took off," Ayres recalled. "The place had a lot to do with it – the students were so excited about being there that they did three times more than we'd planned, including an improvised performance Saturday night of Dylan Thomas' *Under Milkwood*. It was really amazing." [8] He returned with students in the spring, and then worked the hallways of Parlin Hall to quickly recruit 11 students to come out for a 10-day summer-semester visit. That stay culminated in an "Elizabethan Entertainment" of Shakespeare scenes for the public in the Theater Barn, and Ayres returned home with the vision of a year-round program in his head. He began making plans and raising funds for an ongoing series of fall, spring, and summer courses that would take advantage of this new "empty space" for exploration.

In retrospect, it's clear that Miss Ima's request had fallen on the most receptive ears she would have been likely to find in the university's English department. Ayres had begun experimenting with performance as a small component of his Shakespeare and Elizabethan drama courses from his very first semester at UT six years earlier, and was more or less alone in this department in doing so. The 1960's were a time when the primary methods of teaching Shakespeare in universities were lecture and discussion, occasionally leavened a bit with some dramatic readings by the professor or students. Ayres's teachers in his PhD program at Ohio State University, John Harold Wilson and Harold Walley, had preached the importance of

[8] Ayres interview with author, 1990.

considering performance while reading Shakespeare, though they were focused more on the awareness of the plays as scripts for actors and on original conditions of Elizabethan performance – they did not actually ask students to perform roles, scenes, or plays together. As a graduate student at Ohio State, Ayres began inviting his undergraduates to play out small sections of text in different ways to see how changing inflection could alter meaning. His first big step into ensemble performance work came spontaneously one day during that first semester at the University of Texas, when, after a spirited discussion about contrasting interpretations of Portia and Shylock in Act Four, scene one (the "trial scene") of *The Merchant of Venice,* Ayres was inspired to invite students to work in two small groups to create performances that offered two starkly interpretations of character and motivation in the scene. A spark was lit, Ayres recalled: "It was astonishing the papers that came out of it… many of (the students) wrote very well and deftly about the complexity and the ambiguity and that you could see the thing in so many different ways. And what that did to me, it showed that performance is a way of opening up rather than closing up." [9] Ayres began taking students to different intriguing spots around the UT campus and Austin to perform Shakespeare scenes and bring to life stories from *The Hundred Merry Tales*. Just ten months before the first Shakespeare class visited Winedale, the *Daily Texan* student newspaper had covered an evening visit by Ayres and his students to the rotunda of the grand state Capitol, where they performed scenes from *Hamlet*, taking particular delight in the line, "A certain convocation of politic worms is e'en at him…" [10]

[9] Interview with Ayres by Robert Faires for *Austin Chronicle* article, provided by Faires; 1995.
[10] Clipping from *Daily Texan* in Winedale archives, Feb. 1970.

So the Winedale Theater Barn, empty out in its meadow most of the year, was suddenly transformed into a classroom like no other – "and that was it, I was on my way," Ayres recalled.[11] Suddenly the experiments that had worked fairly well in Austin could be taken to the next level of commitment, focus, and intensity. "Shakespeare… at… Winedale," as its spare and simple name suggests, is about a playwright and a place coming together – about words being spoken aloud, and listened to intently, in a particular space away from "the ordinary," where wonder can "seem familiar." Ayres began remarking to visiting reporters and journalists early on that the journey out to Winedale evoked the journey to the "green world" as set forth by Northrop Frye in the influential *Anatomy in Criticism* (1957):

> In a very real sense, the Winedale workshop is like the Arden of *As You Like It* – the pastoral retreat where human problems are worked out. We use performance here as a means to understanding, not as an end in itself. The students begin to learn about themselves through their roles. Every Shakespeare play provides an opportunity to see how the characters in it play their roles in life. [12]

It was a setting that seemed to release the imaginations of energetic, passionate, emotionally hungry young people at a time of cultural and political change in the country. In her remarkable essay "Barn Dance: The Early Years of Shakespeare at Winedale," New York writer Alice Gordon recalls her first encounter with Ayres and the program in the fall of 1972, and the "rough magic" already being created out in the country:

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[11] Ayres interview with author, fall 2005.
[12] Ayres, quoted in Molly Ivins' article, "Shakespeare, Country Style," printed in brochure form by the Hogg Foundation for Mental Health, 1973.

> Shakespeare at Winedale…was barely two years old and already had an air of myth… Dr. Ayres told us a string of anecdotes about class performances in the property's old cedar barn. One in particular still fills me with longing to have been there: at dusk, for the Queen Mab scene in *Romeo and Juliet*, English major Carl Smith made an entrance from the roof, opening and climbing through the slatted-wood shutters of the hayloft windows and, against a backdrop of sky, released a glass jar of butterflies into the darkened barn. How could someone come up with *that* while studying Shakespeare? I wondered. [13]

Winedale was doubly unique as a setting full of Shakespearean qualities: it had the remote, rural atmosphere of quiet, where one could hear the crickets at night in the barn, see deer standing in the dew-sparkled meadow at dawn, and be awed into silence by the vast expanse of the Milky Way above on a moonless night after the Barn lights had been shut down -- all things one would no doubt have experienced as a young person growing up in Stratford long ago – but it also had Wagner's Store, where Marilyn and Rollie Wagner ran a country store, restaurant, and one-pump gas station that catered to the local German-Texan farmers, thus bringing in a rich local culture with its own accents, rituals, and traditions and becoming something of a Boar's Head tavern that grounded the students in a vivid local reality. The quirky, eccentric, and soulful rural and small-town characters of so many of the plays, from the shepherds in *As You Like It* and *Winter's Tale* to the craftsmen of *Midsummer* to Dogberry and the watch in *Much Ado* and of course the tavern regulars in Eastcheap, seemed reflected at times in the voices and personalities of colorful local residents such as Delphine and Rosalee Hinze, who spoke in rich German-Texan accents and sang old German songs while

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[13] Gordon, Alice, "Barn Dance: The Early Years of Shakespeare at Winedale," in David Dettmer (ed.), *The Texas Book Two*, University of Texas Press, Austin, 2012, p. 239-240.

accompanied by an accordion. The Winedale locals loved their beer ("bee-yah," as the melodious German-Texan accent made it sound), and came to see the plays and cheer on the seasonal visitors to their community. Eventually many of them came to work for the university on the Winedale grounds in various capacities, from cook to groundskeeper to night watchman. Students would often step out of the dorm to see Delphine, in a work shirt, jeans, boots, and broad-brimmed straw hat, mowing a field with a tractor and all the while singing sonorously in German. Many of the locals gradually became friends with the spirited braless gals and cheerful longhairs from the university. "The way we grew up, we didn't know a stranger," recalls Gloria Jaster, a fourth-generation resident of the Winedale-Round Top area, who worked first for Miss Ima at Winedale part-time while going to a nearby agricultural college and eventually was promoted to director of the Winedale site in the mid-1970's. [14]

Students would walk across the county highway, which saw a car once an hour perhaps, to grab a soft drink in the afternoon or a beer at the end of a long day and night, and perhaps pop a quarter in the jukebox and do some boot-scooting (in dance slippers, most often) while the locals chuckled approvingly. Gloria Jaster fondly recalls teaching entire student groups the “Cotton-Eyed Joe” out on the highway blacktop in front of the store. Rollie Wagner’s father, "Papa" Wagner, who lived above the store and had hand-punched the tin lanterns in the Barn years before, was wary of the students at first, Ayres recalls, but was astonished and moved when so many Winedale students came to "Mama" Wagner's funeral, early in the program's history; so when he knew his time was up, he made left directions to

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[14] Interview with Gloria Jaster, December 2014, Winedale.

Rollie and Marilyn to buy a keg of beer for his funeral service, "so the students who came would have a nice time." [15] Ayres recalls one evening when Gloria and other locals dropped by the Barn during nightly improvisation games and ended up joining in, “and they were pretty good, too.” Another evening on what was to be a final performance for a visiting semester class, a pouring thunderstorm flooded the Barn floor and turned it to muck -- so the class worked furiously, with the Wagners' enthusiastic approval, to clear out the store and fill it with folding chairs for an impromptu performance there, with entrances coming from the front screen door on one side and the kitchen/bar area on the other. [16] Students became quite devoted to the dormitory cooks, especially Angelene Zwernemann, who cooked at Winedale for three decades and would always give a broad smile and hug to any returning Winedaler. The summer classes would decorate and ride upon a float in the historic Fourth of July parade in Round Top, five miles up the road, and later that summer they would put on their one packed-away dress-up outfit and perform scenes at Bethlehem Lutheran Church's annual ice cream social. This rich integration with the local community found its way into the summer performances – most memorably in the summer of 1975, when *Much Ado About Nothing* began with a parade down the highway as the soldiers returned home:

> [Ayres] recruited the high school marching band the Polka Dots from the nearby town of Burton, borrowed one of Winedale manager Gloria Jaster's horses and a harness to carry a Texas flag, and found a wagon and driver to bring the play's soldiers home from war to Messina-at-Winedale. Our characters invited the whole audience to leave their seats and step outside for the occasion, and we all lined the road and drive from the gate to the barn. "This is how I understand a necessary theater," writes Peter Brook in The

[15] Interview with Ayres, November 2014.
[16] Ibid.

> Empty Space, "one in which there is only a practical difference between actor and audience, not a fundamental one." With our Much Ado, an imaginary celebration merged with a real one, and as Doc later said, the whole play "exploded with just everything imaginable, or unimaginable. You had to be there." [17]

Early newspaper articles about the program attest to the fact that about May or so each year, locals moseying into Wagner's Store would start asking Marilyn, "When are Doc and Shakespeare coming back?" It was, in a way, a love affair that surprised and delighted both sides of what was then seen as a cultural divide (one only needs to watch the scene in the 1969 film *Easy Rider* when the hippies go into the redneck country café and for the prevailing archetype of such encounters at the time).

And yet, interestingly, this fusion of new and old, hippie and country, urban and rural, was happening in other cultural meeting places in the country in the early 1970's – so in fascinating ways, Shakespeare at Winedale became another pioneer in this phase of Texas history. It takes some work for students today to imagine or recapture the vibrant cultural energies that swirled around university campuses during the late 1960's and 1970's. There had been an explosion, a release, in the worlds of music, political activism, free speech, theater, film, writing, art, fashion, you name it. In Austin – a relatively laid-back state capital and college town that was an oasis of liberal thought in the middle of a very conservative state – students were marching in the streets to protest the Vietnam War, burning bras, letting their "freak flag fly" (ie, growing their hair long), experimenting with drugs, forming psychedelic garage bands, opening music clubs with trippy light shows, questioning authority, searching

[17] Gordon, p. 249.

openly for identity as they rejected President Richard Nixon's "silent majority," and looking for new ways to live, work, and play together – while also craving some kind of return to an "authentic" past before the mass-produced conformity that had been rigidly in place before Kennedy was assassinated and the Beatles hit America. The "human potential" movement was growing, spurred in part by the founding in 1962 of the Esalen Institute in Big Sur, California. Communal living and food cooperatives were becoming part of the landscape, and the new *Whole Earth Catalog* extolled the virtues of counterculture life and the back-to-the-land movement. A cheeky and rebellious playfulness was in the air – starting in the late 1960's, "happenings" were the rage in the art world, and in theater, Viola Spolin's "theater games" were catching on as improvisation was seen as a new way to access a more immediate truth through spontaneous performance. Along a sidewalk beside "The Drag," across from the heart of the UT campus and the West Mall, where protests and rallies often attracted large crowds, young artisans began gathering to sell handmade crafts, jewelry, and tie-dyed shirts; they called their site the People's Renaissance Market, the word "Renaissance" being another marker of a youth culture looking both forward and back into the riches and lessons of history.

Long-standing boundaries between seeming opposites in countless arenas were being questioned, and busted open, sometimes defiantly, sometimes quietly with a smile; just a few months before the first students journeyed out to Winedale, a bunch of hard-working, music-loving Austin hippies opened the Armadillo World Headquarters, Austin's answer to San Francisco's legendary rock club Fillmore East, thus creating out of an old National Guard armory a wide-open place where rednecks and longhairs would eventually sit side by side on

the concrete floor, sip Lone Star longnecks under a haze of marijuana smoke, and listen to a country singer and songwriter, newly arrived back in Texas from Nashville, who happened to be a personal favorite (and later lifelong friend) of national championship-winning University of Texas Longhorns football coach Darrell Royal. His name was Willie Nelson.

All of those energies made for vigorous, free-wheeling, and sometimes contentious university classrooms in the early 1970s, and when the first students arrived at Winedale, they brought that same restless desire to make things happen to the empty space of the Theater Barn. As Ayres remembers:

> I've lovingly thought of the eleven kids in summer '71 as motley (I had to recruit them from just about everywhere to get started) but they developed a wonderful ensemble spirit through their struggle with the scenes and with one another. For some ten days (and late nights) they argued, challenged, demanded, searching for the "something" in the something in scene. There were tears and yelling. But there was always respect, hugs, back-rubbing, and relaxation exercises on the wet clay barn floor, and wonderful improvisations at night. Reprieve. The next day they entered the arena again with the same fighting spirit. It is no wonder to me that several students have described the experience as "heroic." [18]

Ayres often commented to his later students that the classes in the early '70s seemed to have come of age in a culture that had a unique kinship with the energies and sudden cultural shifts of Elizabethan England. Later that would change, Ayres recalls, and he would begin to have to push students to take risks and push the boundaries.

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[18] Quoted in Gordon, p. 247.

In the midst of this cultural swirl, it is instructive to take a pause and ask: How did what was happening at Winedale in those first few years fit into the historical timeline/ storyline of the evolving role of performance in the university-level study of Shakespeare? By the time of the famous 1984 *Shakespeare Quarterly* teaching issue, in which more than half the articles extolled the virtues of the exciting new performance-centered approach, Ayres had been taking students to Winedale for nearly 15 years, and had been using performance work in class for six years previous to that; interestingly his experience with resistance and skepticism from colleagues about what he was up to would more or less chart the tides that were flowing nationally in this academic pendulum swing. Ayres was often told in the early years that his classes were more appropriate for the Drama department, and weathered one department chair who disagreed with the aims of the program and would not support it. [19] Meanwhile, in 1974, J.L. Styan was a lone voice in the first Teaching issue of *Shakespeare Quarterly*, declaring that "the way of discovering [Shakespeare] is by playing him" and that by doing so "the true Shakespeare, and what is most honest and relevant in Shakespeare, emerges relentlessly." [20] A decade later, post-"Shakespeare Revolution," which through the 1960's and 1970's brought an eager new awareness to academia of the theatrical nature of these play texts, a watershed moment for Shakespeare-through-performance studies arrived

[19] Ayres interview, 2014.
[20] Styan, J.L., "Direct Method Shakespeare," *Shakespeare Quarterly*, Vol. 25, No. 2 (Spring, 1974), 198-200.

with that 1984 *SQ* issue, in which editor John F. Andrews stated with what now seems a trace of astonishment:

> A decade ago "performance-oriented" pedagogy was relatively unfamiliar among Shakespeareans and was anything but universally accepted as the wave of the future. Now it is difficult to find a dissenting voice: virtually everybody acknowledges the need to approach Shakespeare's plays as dramatic rather than literary works. [21]

As Barbara Hodgdon put it: "By the early 1980s, the idea that the place to study the plays was the theatre – whether that meant actual performance spaces, classroom theatres, or theatres of the mind's eye – had taken hold." [22] By the time of the third Teaching issue in 1990, editor Ralph Alan Cohen noted another shift; he was surprised to receive very few submissions focused on performance pedagogy, and concluded, "…the relative quiet about performance approaches means that, whether or not teachers are using performance in class, the argument for its benefits has won the field… Performance pedagogy seems to have attained the status of a given." [23] In 1999, Milla Cozart Riggio's *Teaching Shakespeare through Performance* gathered 27 different essays on the subject; in her introduction, Riggio argued that "…performance pedagogy – more than simply an approach or option – provides a holistic frame with a broad range of options and implications." Her opening essay also charted both the explosive growth of performance studies and the critical backlash against the trend during the ascendancy of new historicism and cultural materialism in the later '80s and '90s: "At the heart of the change are, basically, the postmodern

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[21] Andrews, John F., "From the Editor," *Shakespeare Quarterly*, Vol. 35, No. 5, Special Issue: Teaching Shakespeare (1984), pp. 515-516.
[22] Hodgdon, Barbara, and Worthen, W.B., *A Companion to Shakespeare and Performance*, Blackwell, Malden, MA, 2005, p. 2.
[23] Cohen, Ralph Alan, *Shakespeare Quarterly*, Vol. 41, No. 2, (Summer, 1990) pp. iii.

emphasis on historical relativism and the debunking of cultural idols," with Shakespeare being the main one. [24] Two years earlier, for example, in James Bulman's anthology *Shakespeare, Theory and Performance*, many of the heroes of the performance-based approach – from John Barton and Cicely Berry to Alan Dessen – took a solid drubbing, with a main sin being, in Cary Mazer's words, making "undue claims for the transhistorical universality of theatrical practice or artistic meaning." [25] Riggio noted in her introduction:

> Occasionally some respondents [to a survey of MLA members]… indicated that while they once used performance methods, they no longer do so… reminding us that in the 1990s performance pedagogy is no longer an easily romanticized option. Stripped of the potentially smug assumption that plays are meaningful only when performed, both performance theory and performance teaching strategies are, on the whole, more critically and theoretically aware than they were a decade ago. [26]

In other words, the new field had to grow up a bit, take its lumps from its critics, incorporate the criticism, and keep moving forward; Riggio concluded on an up note, reminding us that "far more often we hear that teaching Shakespeare through performance continues to be liberating both to readers and their students." *A Companion to Shakespeare and Performance* (2005), edited by Barbara Hodgdon and W.B. Worthen, featured another 34 essays on "performance studies," which is a broad enough label to include the examination of theatrical performance, films, and videos. In it, James Loehlin, five years into his tenure as director at Winedale, gave a bit of a rebel cry against the critics of performance, suggesting that "performance pedagogy…

[24] Riggio, Milla Cozart, ed., *Teaching Shakespeare through Performance*, MLA, New York, 1999, p. 7.
[25] Mazer, Cary, "Historicizing Alan Dessen," in James Bulman (ed.) *Shakespeare, Theory, and Performance*. London: Routledge, pp. 149-67.
[26] Riggio, p. 11.

makes Shakespeare real for the students, a part of their bodies… it gives the students something they can live with and live through, and for that, a few essentialist assumptions may not be such a high price to pay." [27]

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A key component of the "Shakespeare Revolution" was the growth of the regional theater scene in America in the mid-20th century, and the concomitant emergence of new Shakespeare festivals, which often took inspiration from the exciting new Royal Shakespeare Company and National Theatre in England. Ayres had spent two summers teaching and observing at the American Shakespeare Festival in Stratford, Connecticut, in the early 1960's, and had been disenchanted by what he saw and heard; he recalls egocentric directors who seemed to put themselves above the plays and catered to a rich, snobbish clientele. So when the battle cry went out in the 1980's to bring the theater departments and English departments more together in the teaching of Shakespeare, Ayres was not interested, and rarely accepted drama majors to the Winedale program. He resisted directing, and found theater terms such as "blocking" and "run-through" to be hindrances to the spirit of play; to him they invited a kind of "save it for the real performance" attitude. Ayres had been inspired, riveted at times by the passionate engagement his early students would demonstrate in improvisation and how that fed into freewheeling but highly focused Shakespearean performance; so gradually he began

[27] Loehlin, Loehlin, James, "Teaching Through Performance," in Barbara Hodgdon and W. B. Worthen (eds.) *A Companion to Shakespeare and Performance*, *A Companion to Shakespeare and Performance*, Blackwell, Malden, MA, 2005, p. 642.

to develop an approach that emphasized the vital spirit of play as a force that could bring a special moment to life onstage due to the intense focus and complete commitment to performance of the entire group. The play approach was encouraged through nightly improvisation sessions that often lasted past midnight during the early part of the summer session. The course reading list began to reflect this focus, with Peter Brooks' *The Empty Space*, which famously proclaimed in its final line, "A play is play"[28], and Erving Goffman's *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, with its analysis of "regional behavior"; copies of Keith Johnstone's seminal *Impro*, Theater Games, Grotwoski's *Toward a Poor Theater*, and Jan *Kott's Shakespeare Our Contemporary* were also much in evidence even into the early 1980's. Ayres often referred to Johan Huizinga's *Homo Ludens: The Play Element in Culture*. Huizinga's work on play seemed to echo the approach the students were using to vividly embody their characters and live with and through them, rather than pretend to be professional actors:

> Our point of departure must be the conception of an almost childlike play-sense expressing itself in various play-forms, some serious, some playful, but all rooted in ritual and productive of culture by allowing the innate human need of rhythm, harmony, change, alternation, contrast and climax, etc., to unfold in full richness. [29]

Ayres eventually developed and began to articulate at Winedale a concept that students were best to be attuned to -- the contrast between "play" and "show" as performative approaches to working on Shakespeare. "Play" was an active engagement demanding that each student commit to her or his character, inhabit that character through performance -- with the words of

[28] Brook, Peter, *The Empty Space* (Methuen, New York: 1968) p. 89.
[29] Huizinga, Johan, *Homo Ludens*. Beacon, Boston, 1950: p. 75.

the character being the mask that one would inhabit in a mask exercise, or to put it another way, the rules of a game, the boundaries to stay inside of – and led to Winedale evenings such as the one writer Molly Ivins described after her visit: "The performances were not always the best you'd seen… but were marked by intense energy and an often startling originality." [30]And of course the word "play" aligned with all of the references to players in Shakespeare: "Play out the play!" as Falstaff shouts after being interrupted in the tavern scene. "Show" was seen as representing a self-conscious attempt to impress others, as in "put on a show." It encouraged a star system, rather than a rigorous ensemble focus; it led to lazy, crowd-pleasing events rather than the sensation of the play happening for the first time ever that very moment, as a shared communal experience with audience, text, place, and players all coming together to make the experience whole.

Ayres once jotted several pages of notes on what he saw as the difference between play and show -- and the list went to 31 comments. The first ten:

1) "Show" is not organic. It is a rehearsed, practiced event. It simply unfolds the predictable.
2) I've never felt comfortable when someone represents a Winedale play as "show" not only because they're using a stock theatrical term but because the term cannot capture the organic quality of play.
3) "Show" is something prepared primarily for an audience – play engages the audience through the engagement of players.

[30] Ivins, Molly, "Shakespeare Country-Style," reprinted in 1974 by the Hogg Foundation, adapted from original in *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning*, Vol. 5 (1973).

4) In this regard, I’ve pointed out the symbolism of movement from one side of the theatre (circle) through the stage (where a second encounter takes place) to the final moment where players and audience engage one another.

5) One reason the term “show” doesn’t work for me is my experience with professional companies, directors, actors. There is little attempt to engage as a group, to work on the play as an ensemble, with a full commitment from everyone. Everyone has his part and that’s all he cares about. At the Globe, actors in the play read magazines during performances, drink coffee, talk, smoke outside the theatre until someone calls them in.

6) I suppose, then, that I see play as unqualified experience. One must enter into it fully, completely, without qualifications, resistance, hesitation. One must surrender to play. Anything less forfeits the right or privilege to participate. Only when one is completely at one with play can he be a player.

7) Hence, to play, one must be free of restrictions, directions, impulses, of anything that prevents or inhibits spontaneous, improvisational actions and language.

8) Play therefore requires 180 degree vision, clarity, and genuine willingness to see in all directions, move in all directions, to speak, act, move with respect to circumference. Globe.

9) This notion is positively Renaissance. “Everything contains its opposite.” Erasmus: *In Praise of Folly*: redefines values by praising their opposites.

10) What the foregoing speaks to is play as an ever-changing, ever-creative, protean experience.[31]

To Ayres's mind, this "protean" experience invited each Winedale student to become, in effect, Nick Bottom -- "Let me play the lion too!" Improvisations worked to encourage a fearless flexibility onstage, which kept performances alive rather than letting them become rote. Each character, each word, was given its moment, its significance. What emerges in this approach, I believe, is a gradual attunement to a realization: Shakespeare was a *player* first, who wrote for a company of fellow players -- and so he was in the business of creating opportunities for players through the telling of a story. At Winedale, the minor characters -- poor Frances in the *1 Henry IV* tavern scene with his "Anon, anon sir", or Watch #2 with his questions for Dogberry in *Much Ado*, or the "living dead man" Dr. Pinch in *Comedy of Errors*

[31] Notes written by James Ayres to Clayton Stromberger, fall 2007.

– were given as much attention as Hamlet or Beatrice and emerged as vivid, fully realized, and integral to the entire world of the play. Students were charged by Ayres to "find the impulse behind every single word" of their character, no matter how few lines that persona spoke; this could lead to performances where every word seemed to hum and resonate with attention and energy.[32] I would argue that as opposed to the much-maligned universalist notion of some inherent meaning in Shakespeare that was hereby being uncovered, this approach embraced what Keats described as Shakespeare's "negative capability": "Negative Capability, that is, when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason." [33] The search for that original impulse became a kind of Zen koan where it was the effort that led to a breakthrough, not the discovery of a waiting answer; students had to play and work their way fearlessly to their own way of speaking the words. Ayres furthered this process by adamantly refusing to direct the play as a "show" with blocking and all the traditional methods of high school theater, and by stubbornly insisting that the students – to take a favorite line from T.S. Eliot's "Little Gidding," which he would sometimes quote from memory – "not cease from exploration." There were, and still are not, curtain calls onstage after the performances – instead, the students greet audience members outside the Barn and offer them refreshments and cheese and crackers. Ayres challenged students to find their own initiative and (more in the later years, when students had become a bit less free-thinking and feisty) would often sternly announce on the first night of

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[32] Author's Winedale notes, summer of 1983.
[33] John Keats, letter to his brother, Oct. 1818, quoted in *John Keats*, by Walter Jackson Bate, Harvard University Press, 2008, page 249.

the summer, "The one thing I don't want to hear out here is, 'What do I do now?'" Alice Gordon described her revelation at Winedale about play in this way:

> It took some time, years perhaps, for me to realize what was going on in that out-of-body experience [of playing as an ensemble through Shakespeare's text]: the twenty-two-year-old me, cavorting behind that barn, had reencountered after a very long separation the eight-year-old me who, in a yard, a meadow, the middle of the street, like the young imgaginers we once were, knew instinctively, unconsciously, unfetteredly, how to *play*. Now, I was playing with Shakespeare and his imaginary castles, kings, and horses! This stranger who was me, I began to realize on that crisp fall day, was the person I wanted to live with for the rest of my life. [34]

The freeing energy of a group of normally self-conscious young people diving into imaginative play for the first time since childhood was made possible by the trust that came from living together and taking risks together onstage; students begin, like athletes, to play not just for themselves but for each other. James Loehlin's description of an improvised performance of *Julius Caesar* one evening all around the Winedale grounds, necessitated by the fact that construction was being done inside the barn and was running over schedule, is particularly vivid, and points to the opportunities for insights into the play that this atmosphere of trust and willingness to risk can foster:

> Every scene was charged with new discoveries… The murder of Caesar was bathed in the red light of the sun setting across the lake. The killing of Cinna was a twilit scene of lynch-mob savagery, against the disturbing backdrop of Southern pecan trees. The battles took place in near total darkness, with soldiers running and shouting over a vast field. Brutus died in the glare of a lone street lamp near the highway. Throughout the play, the students had made bold, original and effective choices…. it was a performance of Julius Caesar that all those who were present will

[34] Gordon, p. 243.

remember for the rest of their lives. One student wrote to me later that it was "the most intensive play experience" he had ever had, because "everyone remained constantly committed to the play, 100% invested in what was going on, and everyone felt tree to try anything and everything to feed the performers." [35]

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After seeing a summer class perform in the Barn, audience members would often comment about how much more they had enjoyed the Winedale performances than others they had seen by professional companies. Ayres, reflecting on this over time with the students, began to discuss this quality in terms of what he came to call "the second play."

What Ayres saw at Winedale was that this second play or story, unfurling right alongside Shakespeare's play, told the story of the group's struggle to create something magical together. Audiences could sense the way in which the second play would intertwine with the first play, and sometimes give it added resonance, like the harmonic created by Tuvan throat singers, who seem to be able to sing two notes at once and thus create a third note as well. And as in a sporting event, during a performance of a dramatic text we are in a state of suspended tension or anticipation as the story unfolds, because while the ending of the first play has been set by the playwright, the ending of the second play has not; it is a story whose ending we might guess, though we cannot fully predict it. Can the players become more than the sum of their parts? Can a group of college kids with no previous Shakespeare or performing experience transcend their individual limitations and do something

[35] Loehlin, p. 641.

extraordinary? Shakespeare captured this harmonic of the second play perfectly in the final scene of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, when Nick Bottom, Peter Quince, and the other craftsmen finally reach the moment of truth and must perform their version of the Pyramus and Thisbe tale before the court. We know how that old story ends, but we do not know (watching an individual production of the play) how the experience of taking on this play will end for this particular Nick Bottom and this particular group of craftsmen. Will they overcome all obstacles and give a great performance? Can they transcend the interruptions of the court? In many productions, the poignancy of the lovers' death scene is amplified, and commented upon, by the poignancy of seeing these players, derided moments before by Philostrate as "hard-handed men" who "never labored in their minds 'til now", reach a level of commitment and emotional truth in performance that asks "tears in the true playing of it," as Bottom had promised boldly in his first scene. [36]

Winedale has never been about an academic concept of original practices; and yet there was often the feeling of something timeless in the experience of playing a play in the Barn – again, not that this work was revealing any particular timeless truths that Shakespeare the all-knowing author had inscribed there, but rather that in playing together and creating a communal experience with play, players, place and audience came together in a way that emphasized a shared humanity. Shakespeare's words became the vehicle for that humanity --

[36] Kevin Kline aimed for this poignancy in his performance of Bottom in the film version of *Midsummer* from 1999, as he wistfully said goodbye at the end to the magical time of being a great actor before the Duke.

and truly timeless elements in the plays, such as loss, grief, joy, fear, death, rebirth, and courage, were simply there, not put for show but simply experienced, lived in the moment.

Did this setting and situation encourage a more "authentic" performance? Ayres never made claims, as many theater troupes earnestly do today, of coming closer to Shakespeare's original intentions via "original practices." Winedale is freed, just as any players of Shakespeare are, by the simple fact that those performances at the Globe are lost to us forever. Josh Marshall, focusing on mystery plays and medieval drama, concludes that it is basically impossible for us to have an authentic experience of theater as it was experienced "back then":

> The distance between a modern audience and the original performance of medieval drama is not just one of vocabulary and pronunciation. It is also one of context. What distinguishes medieval drama from that of our own time as much as anything else is its religious sense of festive occasion. No amount of carnival trappings is going to reproduce the essentially spiritual dimension of the original performances and one must accept that this represents a major omission from even the most rigorous recreations of original staging. [37]

Claire Sponsler reminds us that a sense of "bereavement" hovers over the ways in which we look back at the medieval past, and this is certainly true for the Elizabethan era as well. [38] We would give almost anything to know what it was *really* like to stand and watch a Shakespeare play in the Globe; our reconstructions are self-conscious, and probably self-deluding, efforts. And yet the experience of performing, and seeing Shakespeare at Winedale *is* a kind of "festive

[37] Marshall, *Cambridge Companion,* 296.

[38] Sponsler, *Ritual Imports*, 173.

occasion," and occasionally a spiritual one for some audience members. [39] The Shakespeare at Winedale experience of "the second play" can link us today with that medieval energy of a communal group of ordinary folk (ie, not professional actors) coming together to do something it has never done before – put on a play that touches on life's mysteries. This can help us experience Shakespeare's work in a fresh and surprising way.

Finally, then, this is the big payoff that Ayres found at Winedale, and that his successor James Loehlin continues to find as well: the students fall in love with the place, the plays, the words, the characters, the community, and each other, and when it all come together at summer's end, the audience can feel this in every scene, every moment, of the performances. The experience is heightened by the "winter and rough weather" that came from the challenges of the endeavor, and the obstacles overcome. The reward for the player in this environment is not the ego boost of being a star, or winning a rapturous curtain call as the lead player: it is, rather, in being given – thanks to the person who organized the experience, the person who wrote the play, the person who donated Winedale to the university, the person who built the stage on which the experience could happen, and on down the line – the opportunity to express the fullest gratitude for what he or she has been able to be a part of that summer. And the best way to express that gratitude is through giving a full-out, sustained effort in every moment and staying in the imaginary world of the play, even when backstage listening and changing costumes; it is a continuous loop that can produce surprising levels of energy, as long as it is

[39] After a particularly intense final performance of *Hamlet* on a broiling August afternoon in the summer of 1983, Ayres told his students of the comments of one audience member who came up to him after the play's end, astonished, and asked, "You realize that was a religious experience, don't you?"

not thrown out of alignment by pride or complacency. This was the spirit Ayres, a former minor league baseball player and Little League coach, sought to cultivate at Winedale. Out there in the audience one Thursday night in the Barn, for example, might be the Winedale cooks; what a wonderful opportunity to say thank you to them by giving a great performance.

So in a sense, this continuous loop had as its starting point the generous, loving spirit of the people of Winedale – hard-working, patient, ready to sing and have a beer in the evening, and always there on Thursday night for the opening summer performance. Molly Ivins cracked in her 1973 article that the place was "like Hobbitland – the Hobbits have all grown to around six feet and they speak English with a German accent, but they continue their beer-drinking, pipe-puffing, peace-loving habits." [40] The local folks referred to the whole program, the return of the students each summer, simply as "Shakespeare," which came out sounding like "Shake-speah" in the local accent, with strongly punched consonants and musical vowels: "Shake-speah's comin' to town again." These people, many of whom attended German-language schools as children in the area, whose grandparents in some cases had helped hoist the Winedale Barn's huge hand-hewn cedar beams generations before, didn't bat an eye at the longhairs from Austin who came barreling down the Farm-to-Market road in their VW's in the early 1970s wearing bandanas and cutoff shorts; in the era of Richard Nixon and Vietnam protests and George Wallace running for president, the two groups from very different cultures saluted each other through performances (the locals sang German songs, the kids performed improvisations and Shakespeare), worked side by side to help create something special that

[40] Molly Ivins article, reprinted in 1974 by Hogg Foundation, adapted from original in *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning*, Vol. 5 (1973), Number 9.

brought visitors to the area (in something of the same way as the cycle plays reportedly did for cities like York), shared a beer and maybe a jukebox dance back at Wagner's Cafe after a hard day of work, and then sometimes even became lifelong friends.

When the lines between life and art begin to blur, you are on your way to the second play – and perhaps to a "religious sense of festive occasion." The cultivation of this feeling of gratitude in Ayres's students, mixed with the cultivation of a spirit of fearless ensemble play, helped this English professor create a performance environment at Winedale in which play, in the program's finest moments, became a form of giving, rather than taking; of sharing, rather than of trying to win. It is an approach that deserves further study as the experiment at Winedale enters its 45th summer. I can do no better in describing the impact this kind of experience has on a student's lifelong love for Shakespeare than by quoting the final paragraph of Alice Gordon's essay, "Barn Dance":

> Our audiences could feel it. We loved them for that, and they loved us back… And after *Much Ado About Nothing*, a man greeted me outside with, "You sent me to nirvana!" You and me both, sir. We all went together. [41]

[41] Gordon, p. 251.

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Idalia Clark
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